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Winthrop President Sets Out Goal of 'Readiness' to Meet New Realities

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Winthrop President Sets Out Goal of 'Readiness' to Meet New Realities

Quick Facts

- No layoffs are planned; employees were told a worst-case scenario could lead to 3-4 furlough days, beginning in Fall 2010.
- A longer-term goal is for Winthrop to be ready in mid-2011, when federal stimulus funding expires.



Anthony DiGiorgio

ROCK HILL, S.C. - **Winthrop University** faculty and staff Friday afternoon were given an in-depth briefing about what they can expect over the next 12-15 months, as state funding for higher education continues to plummet, the loss of federal stimulus funds looms on the horizon, and families expect more in exchange for tuition dollars.

President Anthony DiGiorgio spent the better part of an hour detailing steps already underway to deal with a state budget for the coming fiscal year that makes permanent all appropriation reductions to date, and uses federal stimulus funding to mitigate the impact only temporarily. But budget issues are only half the challenges ahead, DiGiorgio said, noting that the current era of rapid change means students expectations from higher education are evolving, so Winthrop should address those expectations concurrently.

DiGiorgio spelled out a two-phase process for an initiative called "**Readiness Winthrop.**" The first phase will deal with closing any gap remaining in the university's spending plan for the fiscal year that begins July 1 of this year. The second-phase will be a more wide-ranging look at university operations, keyed to having a readiness plan in place for when federal stimulus funds disappear July 1, 2011. **DiGiorgio** was authorized to set the process in motion by a resolution approved by the **Winthrop Board of Trustees** on April 16.

DiGiorgio said he anticipates no layoffs in the near term, and spelled out budget scenarios that could range from no furlough days for employees, to a potential "3 or 4" furlough days, which the president said would be the last step used in filling any budget gap that is evident in the Fall, when final enrollment figures are in.

The state budget headed to the Senate next week will make permanent all mid-year reductions to date, plus slice another **\$3.4 million** from state operating support, at the same time the university has other operational needs to pay for, creating a potential gap of \$5.7 million, according to university officials. While federal stimulus funds will backfill some of that for a year, the university will continue its administrative cutbacks in areas such as vacancy management, utilities conservation and moving most publications to digital formats to bridge any shortfall.

DiGiorgio noted that when current freshmen were born, the state provided about 45 percent of Winthrop's revenues. The cuts ahead will take that level down to 10 percent.

While not in a hiring freeze as part of its budget reductions, the university is filling only "mission-critical" positions near term, and will use the savings from that vacancy management to help fill the gap.

Enrollment will be watched especially closely, as a dip there could deepen the funding gap, while an increase could help bridge it.

“In the good old days, it often was said that educational readiness was about delivering the 3 R’s – reading, ‘riting and ‘rithmetic,” **DiGiorgio** told university faculty and staff, adding, “what a simple time that was. Now we have to employ at least 5 or 6 more ‘R’s’ to achieve readiness for what lies ahead for Winthrop:

- “Review what we do and how we do it.
- “Re-evaluate how we can do it all more effectively and efficiently, while keeping faith with the essential values that help define us.
- “Reflect upon what is key for every student to know, and how we can use emerging technologies to assist their knowing.
- “Reshape and re-organize ourselves – so that we achieve the readiness that is our goal for this process.

“And the trailing edge of all the above will be to reduce our level of spending while retaining our dedication to quality and value.”

The president also said he anticipates the planning for the near term will include a tuition increase for the board’s consideration in June, but recognizes that economic conditions means such an increase should be kept as modest as possible, adding that, “Tuition alone cannot replace all those missing state dollars – especially not in times such as these, when families are under their own serious economic pressures.” Replacing all state dollars lost would require an 8 percent increase, which **DiGiorgio** said was not an acceptable option.

The “**Readiness Winthrop**” initiative is expected to take 12-15 months. Meanwhile, university officials said they will continue to use available resources to invest in three top priorities that have been in place since late 2008: keeping the quality of the students’ experience high, investing in campus safety and security as necessary and continuing to emphasize recruitment of new students.

Winthrop will hold Spring Commencement exercises on May 8, when over 600 undergraduates will receive degrees. Approximately 240 graduate degrees will be conferred on May 6.

[\[Back to Previous Page\]](#)